

Minutes of the Human Rights Commission meeting

April 25, 2023

Present: Dianna Stallone, Alton McCray, Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Chelsea Sunday Kline, Booker Bush, Megan Paik, Angela D'Souza

Meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Public Comment

Ed Olmsted was interested in the topic of Select Committee on Barriers to Service discussion on this month's agenda. He had followed the work of the Policing Review and was concerned about the barriers for those who wish to serve on the Committee to Study Racialized Harms.

Minutes

The March 2023 minutes with an amendment from Dianna were approved with one abstention by Angela.

Select Committee on Barriers to Service

Susan reported the Committee will present their final report, which has been submitted to the City Council, in a meeting in early May. Megan mentioned that at that meeting, the HRC may be asked to support their contribution, the onboarding handbook for new commissioners.

Commission to Study Racialized Harms

Megan shared the link to the application that was posted by Northampton with the deadline of April 28 with a possible extension. Alton had spoken with Councilors Gore and Perry to express his interest in serving on the commission and will submit an application soon. He mentioned that he overheard on the news that the city is seeking 13 and not the 9 to 11 members that were described in the resolution and asked about the discrepancy. This commission is expected to work through at least one year and will be a substantial, visible commitment. Dianna asked about the selection process and the candidates currently considered for the committee. Alton and Megan both recalled from the video of the council meeting that the two sponsors, Councilors Gore and Perry, will advise the Council President and Mayor in selecting the committee membership.

Membership Updates

Booker and Susan's terms will end in June 2023; they intend to step down along with Megan by the start of summer. Megan asked for a co-facilitator in the May meeting and reminded the commissioners that the HRC needs both a chair and vice chair to be compliant with MGL. Angela offered to serve as co-chair but not the chair. Dianna asked again about the level of commitment by current commissioners to finding a way forward; she reiterated her hope for more authority and/or budgetary and advisory powers for the HRC. Megan said that the departing commissioners, particularly since meetings have been remote, have found meaning and purpose through service on other periodic committees and in promoting and/or testifying for local and state legislation with human rights dimensions. However, a general perception of a lack of volunteers' authority and impact on both the individual and committee levels have been well-documented through the survey and reports of the Select Committee on Barriers.

Angela raised the importance of institutional memory transfer (beyond document archives) for boards and requested that departing commissioners consider taking on an unofficial mentoring role for newer members. Chelsea, Angela, Dianna, and Alton all joined HRC within the last nine or ten months. Dianna suggested hosting a social meeting to allow commissioners to meet in person and to bid farewell to the three commissioners leaving in June.

New Business

Robin MacEwan had emailed about the progress made with the city to address racial equity at the community gardens. The work is proceeding in the city through a team led by Merridith O'Leary. They are a) looking at past/present/future Parks and Recreation department policies with a DEIB lens for the parks and recreation department; b) hosting a series of DEIB trainings for gardeners and the Garden Committee – focusing on interrupting racism, Social Determinants of Health, shared space, food access, and health equity; and c) offering space for those who would like to participate in restorative practice work. A consultant of the city, Humans in Common, is engaged in this process.

Kristin Rhodes, Director of the Division of Community Care, has also been invited to speak at the next HRC meeting, anticipated to be at 6:00 p.m. on May 17. Booker suggested that Megan recirculate the minutes from the June 2022 meeting attended by guest speaker Sean Donovan, formerly the Implementation Director of Community Care. Booker was a panelist in one of the film events organized by Sean; he would like the HRC to play a role in the promotions of future Community Care events. Kathy Wicks, former commissioner, shared a link to a training through email. Alton asked about an upcoming meeting date for the HRC's planning committee; he has contacts on the Easthampton Community Relations Committee and Sunderland's Human Rights Task Force, both of whom are interested in collaborating on a possible regional event commemorating the 75th anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights.

The next two HRC monthly meetings are scheduled for May 17 and June 21.

The meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.